

CHAPTER 2

Durham

from City of the New South

h i s t o r i c O v e r v i e w

"A nation that forgets its past can function no better than an individual with amnesia."

- David McCullough

Early History

Long before Durham became an internationally recognized producer of tobacco, two Native American tribes, the Eno and Occoneechi, inhabited the area; but in 1584, Europeans attempted to colonize the area now known as North Carolina. After many failed attempts, permanent settlements began when King Charles II gave the land to eight nobles and their supporters. The town of Durham grew out of Dr. Bartlett Durham's country home after he donated a four-acre tract of land for the construction of a railroad station. With the railroad came economic and trade opportunities that sparked the rise of what would soon become a booming economy. Wesley A. Wright established the first tobacco-processing factory in 1858, and within two years, Durham was home to an academy, a hotel, stores, trade shops, and saloons.

Tobacco and Textiles

No Civil War battles were fought in Durham, but the end of the war provided the backdrop for one of the most important events in Durham history. When Union General William T. Sherman and Confederate General Joseph E. Johnston's troops met near Durham at the end of the war, they decided to avoid unnecessary bloodshed and negotiate a Confederate surrender. The Generals' discussions lasted almost two weeks, and during this time, Durham was neutral ground where soldiers from both sides mixed, mingled, looted J.P. Green's tobacco factory, and smoked "pipes of peace."

When the soldiers returned home to all areas of the Union, they wrote back to Durham for more high-quality "Brightleaf Tobacco" thus launching the birth of a tobacco empire that would spawn such superpowers as American Tobacco, Liggett & Meyers, R.J. Reynolds, and P. Lorillard.



American Tobacco Company Factory on Pettigrew Street, circa 1920. Photo courtesy of North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources

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Durham Hosiery Mills No. 1, circa 1910. Photo courtesy of North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources



View of Trinity College from tower of Epworth Inn, circa 1905. Photo courtesy of North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources

In the 1870s, Washington Duke moved his tobacco crop headquarters to Downtown Durham, and by 1880, Washington Duke, Sons, & Company had two factories and partnerships with two other industry leaders, George W. Watts and Richard H. Wright. By 1890, Julian S. Carr's "Bull Durham" tobacco had become internationally famous. This early, agriculturally driven economy shaped Durham's history and created tremendous tobacco-generated wealth; however, tobacco was not the only successful industry in early Durham.

After an unstable beginning, the textile industry solidified into another pillar of the Durham economy. Julian Carr, followed by the Duke family, began exploring the textile industry in the early 1890s, funding these efforts with tobacco profits. At one time, Durham Hosiery was the world's largest stocking manufacturer.

Through the first half of the twentieth century, Durham's economy relied heavily on the tobacco and textile industries, many of which located headquarters and factories in downtown Durham. Durham tobacco companies reached the height of productivity during and directly following World War II. In 1944, one-fourth of all American-made cigarettes could be traced to Durham. But in the midst of this overwhelming success loomed the beginning of the industry's decline. Published scientific studies and medical statistics began to show direct links between cigarette smoking and cancer which initiated dramatic shrinkage in the industry. The Durham industry that produced 50 million pounds of tobacco in 1947 produced just 4 million in 1986.

University Influence

Since the 1890's when Trinity College, a Methodist institution established in 1838 in Randolph County, relocated to Durham, the city has been home to institutions of higher education. In the early 1920s, J.B. Duke formally expressed his long-suspected desire to establish in Durham a significant institute of higher education. For years, Duke conferred with Trinity president Benjamin Few, and the two men conceived plans for a comprehensive university. They reached an agreement that upon changing Trinity College's name to Duke University, the school would receive \$6 million for the construction of a new campus in addition to a \$40 million endowment. The old Trinity College became Duke University, and Duke hired architect Horace Trumbauer to design a new campus. Duke also purchased the thousands of acres that are now Duke Forest. Duke Hospital and Medical Center was also constructed at this time. These medical facilities quickly grew and are, to this day, one of the largest employers in Durham. Since its inception, Duke University has been an essential component of Durham's economic and cultural viability.

Another notable university in Durham is North Carolina Central University (NCCU). It was founded in 1909 as the National Religious Training School and Chautauqua and was purchased by the State of North Carolina in 1923. Two years later, the General Assembly redefined the school's mission and created the North Carolina College for Negroes, the nation's first state-supported African American college. Although it began as a liberal arts college, over the years, the school has continued to develop its curriculum. Schools of law, library sciences, and education were added along with programs in public administration and criminal justice.



*James E. Sheppard Memorial Library, North Carolina Central University.
Photo courtesy of North Carolina Dept. of Cultural Resources*

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Corner of Main and Corcoran Streets, circa 1914. Photo courtesy of North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources



North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance company, circa 1910. Photo courtesy of North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources

“City of the New South”

The prominence of the African-American community is a unique aspect of Durham's early development. Shortly after the Civil War, large numbers of free and emancipated blacks settled just outside of what was becoming downtown Durham. The employment opportunities created by the burgeoning tobacco industry attracted many to Durham. Several African-American, tobacco-factory neighborhoods developed around Durham; however, the primary black settlement occupied the land along Fayetteville Street between Pettigrew and Umstead and was called Hayti.

In Hayti, Durham's African-American community leaders, with the help of tobacco businessmen, built Durham's first black churches, schools, and businesses. Dr. Aaron Moore, Durham's first black physician, began a pharmacy for blacks in 1895; and three years later, Dr. Moore, John Merrick, and Charles C. Spaulding founded North Carolina's first black owned and operated insurance company, North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company, which has been called the “mother institution in the black community.”

From the company's foundation grew a strong African-American economy virtually unparalleled in other areas of the Reconstruction-era South. After several years, the insurance company was persuaded to construct their new office building on Parrish Street instead of in Hayti. By 1910, the insurance company was prospering and began to buy other Parrish Street properties that became home to black-owned clothing stores, a barber shop, a tailoring shop, a drug store, “Negro Newspaper” offices, and the Mechanics and Farmers Bank. This bank was the first African-American-owned bank in the nation and earned Parrish Street the title “Black Wall Street.” The ability of black and white businesses to function in close proximity and relative peace led Durham to become known as the “City of the New South” at the turn of the century. The success of black business was indicative of the success of Durham's economy as a whole in the first decades of this century. This success provided Durham with a lively downtown, built by prominent architects, builders, and investors who saw promise in the city.

Durham in the 20th Century

The early 20th Century was a boom time for Durham. The population more than doubled between 1900 and 1910, and for the first time, half of the 18,241 residents were urban. Building also flourished during this time. Three hundred buildings, many of which were commercial, were constructed in 1905 alone. Many of Durham's remaining historic buildings were constructed during this time.

The role of local government increased in people's lives during this time with the introduction of compulsory education, restrictions on child labor, vaccination against small pox, and laws concerning the operation of automobiles. With this increased government presence and the increases in population, Durham outgrew its courthouse, and in 1916 a new structure was built at the same location. In 1921, voters adopted a new form of government with councilors, a city manager, and a mayor. During the next decade, the new government extended the boundaries of the city, instituted zoning, and formed the Recreation Department to construct parks in the city.

The Great Depression hit Durham differently than it hit many other cities. Agriculture and textiles were depressed throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s. When the Depression gripped the nation in 1929, it was cushioned and shorter in duration in Durham due to the construction of Duke University and the exponential growth of the tobacco industry. Depression Era work programs were introduced to ease unemployment in Durham. The major accomplishments of these programs were the expansion of parks and recreational opportunities and the construction of new roads and bridges.



Union Station. Photo courtesy of North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources

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Washington Duke Hotel. Photo courtesy of North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources

Change Comes to Durham

Throughout the first half of the 20th Century, the Durham economy relied primarily on tobacco, textiles, and related industries. By the 1960s, however, economic conditions had begun to change significantly, and investment was not occurring in downtown. In 1960, a Redevelopment Commission was created to address blighted Downtown conditions. Three redevelopment plans focusing on separate areas of Downtown were prepared advocating land acquisition and demolition as tools for redevelopment. These Urban Renewal programs often demolished “obsolete” structures in order to spur revitalization. Significant structures such as the 1904 Union Station Building and the Washington Duke Hotel were razed at this time. The Urban Renewal programs resulted in the construction of several new commercial and office buildings and the Downtown ‘loop’ circulation system. Funding was cut before all planned projects were completed.

Technology

As the area’s ties to agriculture and the tobacco industry weakened, research and technology took hold. The first person to successfully sell the idea of an industrial research park to investors was Romeo Guest, a business entrepreneur. Guest noticed the success of industrial research labs that were located around such major universities as Harvard and MIT, and he thought the current day Research Triangle Park (RTP) was an ideal site for such a development because of its proximity to North Carolina State University at Raleigh, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and Duke University. Governor Luther Hodges became interested in Guest’s plan, and a development corporation was founded in 1955. Through fundraising efforts, the corporation obtained the 5,500 acres that now comprise the RTP. Development of the park flourished throughout the 1960s and 1970s as the park attracted major agencies and companies, such as the National Center for Health Statistics, the Air Pollution and Control office, the Environmental Protection Agency, IBM, Burroughs Wellcome Foundation, and the National Humanities Center.

By 1990, RTP was the largest research park in the nation, with more than 31,000 workers and more than 12 million square feet of developed space. Though the Research Park was in many ways beneficial, it also took its toll on the surrounding areas by producing rapid population growth and stress upon local services. As a result, the area lost much of the charm that was the initial attraction for many companies. The park's success, however, has not diminished. In 1998, the RTP contained 42,000 workers and 15.7 million square feet of developed space. The combined annual salaries of the RTP workers exceeds \$1.2 billion.

The trend toward suburbanization experienced throughout the country, the development of Research Triangle Park, and other research/industry-related developments contributed to the decentralization of Durham's economy. As businesses and citizens began to settle in peripheral areas, Downtown's future became increasingly uncertain.

Downtown Revitalization Efforts

Early efforts to revitalize Downtown Durham were not always successful. In 1974, the Downtown Revitalization Foundation, a private sector group concerned about the future of Downtown, commissioned the Downtown Durham Revitalization Plan, but the City did not adopt the plan.

In 1977, the National Register of Historic Places named all of Downtown Durham an Historic District. This recognition signified a renewed appreciation of Downtown's architectural assets and real estate. By the late 1970s, the need for and feasibility of a civic center project had been determined, and in 1982,



Durham Centre

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*“To be grounded in history is
to expect of the future that
which does not follow
mechanistically but flows
from large decisions not yet
made.”*

- C. Wright Mills

voters approved a \$10.5 million bond issue to fund the City's share of the center's construction. The facility was built through a partnership of the City, the County, and a private developer. Substantial public and private investment in Downtown, such as the Civic Center and Marriott Hotel, Durham Centre, and Five Points Plaza, were realized in the late 1980s.

In 1988, Durham Centre opened. This 220,000 square foot office tower was originally intended to be one of two towers. The second tower was delayed pending identification of a tenant and was never constructed. The City funded the \$11 million cost of constructing the 780-space parking garage for the project and participated in funding the civic center, the restoration and expansion of the Royal Center for the Arts, and the Carolina Theatre. During the spring of 1988, work on Five Points Plaza, an adaptive reuse project, began. Five Points represented the private sector's first introduction of housing into the downtown area in recent years and included residential, office, and ground floor retail uses.

At the time of the civic center opening in 1989, there was concern that no plan existed that would direct the future revitalization of Downtown; so a Main Street Committee was formed. The committee hosted community forums on Downtown and eventually a Downtown economic development strategy and master land use plan were prepared, becoming the basis for the 1989 Downtown Durham Revitalization Plan prepared by City/County staff. Goals of the plan included the establishment of a healthy and vibrant Downtown that could return to being a dominant economic center, Downtown housing, an efficient transportation network, and an intensive mixed-use land pattern. The plan also presented actions needed to achieve the plan's goals, including a small business incubator, a second office tower at Durham Centre, other office buildings, the rehabilitation of historic buildings for residential uses, construction of a new baseball stadium and increased on-street parking to aid retail businesses.

Also in 1989, the Downtown Durham Historic District Preservation Plan was created in an attempt to “establish as an explicit, formal City policy the preservation of the architectural heritage of Downtown Durham.” The area within the Downtown ‘loop’ and areas outside the ‘loop’ to the northeast and the southeast were designated as local historic districts reinforcing the area’s National Register status.

In the early 1990s, a group of business leaders and elected officials determined that Durham needed a Downtown development organization. This group raised funds and proposed the idea to the City government. The City Council accepted the plan and matched the privately raised funds with City dollars. In 1993, Downtown Durham, Inc. (DDI) was formed and has become an important advocate for Downtown. The organization assists businesses looking for space in Downtown, promotes Downtown events and actively encourages the revitalization of Downtown.

While development in Downtown Durham moved forward during the 1990s, DDI and the City noticed an increase in developers concerned about the City’s long-term commitment to Downtown and the large infrastructure investment needed to continue the revitalization. As a result the City issued a request for proposals for a new Downtown master plan that would focus on the elements necessary to continue Downtown’s revitalization. This master plan is the result of that effort.

“The practical value of history is to throw the film of the past through the material projector of the present onto the screen of the future.”

- B. H. Liddell Hart
